World Council of Churches

April 2025

Faith and Order UPDATE

Faith and Order Commission, Indonesia, February 2024, Photo: Dalton Darwin/WCC

Greetings from the Moderator of the Commission on Faith and Order

It is my pleasure to present this update of activities by Faith and Order.

As a commission of the World Council of Churches (WCC), we bring together theologians from Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant and other traditions from all over the globe to promote the ecumenical vision of visible unity of the Church. This update presents some of the main areas of our commission's work.

The Faith and Order Commission aims to promote the unity of the Christian Church and has done so for almost a century. Its primary goal is to "proclaim the oneness of the Church of Jesus Christ and to call the churches to the goal of visible unity in one faith and one Eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and in common life in Christ, in order that the world may believe" (By-laws, 3.1).

To achieve this, the commission engages in theological studies and dialogues, addressing doctrinal differences and seeking consensus on key aspects of Christian faith and practice. Notable areas of focus include Faith and Order's

Contents

Greetings from the Moderator of the Commission on Faith and Order 1

Greetings from the Director of the Commission on Faith and Order 2

Meeting of the Faith and Order Commission in Tondano 3

News from the Study Groups 4

Activities of the Secretariat 7

Activities of Commissioners 9

Toward the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order 12

A Selection of Past and Upcoming Events on the Nicaea Anniversary 14

Important Faith and Order Documents 16

Personal Faith and Order Stories 23

work on baptism, eucharist, and ministry and the nature and purpose of the Church. By fostering mutual understanding and cooperation among diverse Christian traditions, the Faith and Order Commission endeavours to manifest the unity that Christ intended for his followers.

In a world fractured by division, conflict, and inequality, the need for unity among Christians is more pressing than ever. The Faith and Order Commission's mission reflects Christ's prayer "that they may all be one" (John 17:21), a call not only for unity within the Church but also for the Church to embody unity as a witness to the world. Today, this unity is vital as a sign of hope and reconciliation in a world yearning for peace and justice. Unity is not merely an organizational goal; it is a profound testimony of the gospel's transformative power to heal, restore, and reconcile a broken world.

As the unity of the Church is the main goal of our work within Faith and Order, this update offers information about the current work of our study groups on ecclesiology, moral discernment, and theological anthropology and on understanding the churches in and for the world.

In this issue we take a special look at the Ecumenical Year 2025 which includes the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order. The 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea (325 CE) gives 2025 a particular significance, and we are delighted that our conference will take place in Egypt at the invitation of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

This update also presents documents that have had a particular impact upon the work of Faith and Order, such as the convergence document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, the study document *Confessing the One Faith*, and the document on *Racism in Theology and Theology against Racism* which was drafted exactly half a century ago. Furthermore, you can find interviews on the theological relevance of the work of Faith and Order and a reflection on how the work of Faith and Order can shape ecumenical work as well as personal lives of faith.

I wish you many interesting insights while reading.

Rev. Prof. Dr Stephanie Dietrich

Greetings from the Director of the Commission on Faith and Order

I am delighted to share with you this Faith and Order Update which appears as we are looking towards the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order, and in the year that marks the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea. The Sixth World Conference offers an incredible opportunity to be together, to manifest the unity that we have, to address the disunity we still have, to offer common witness but also to set a milestone and open up a new era in the work of the Faith and Order Commission. As we prepare for this conference to take place in Egypt in October 2025, the Faith and Order Update offers an insight to the work undertaken by the Faith and Order commissioners and secretariat, as well as the three study groups set up by the commission. This issue also lists some of the events being organized around the world to mark the anniversary of Nicaea, as well as a presentation of two key documents from Faith and Order, and an article marking the 50th anniversary of a consultation on "Racism in Theology and Theology against Racism." I hope that these insights offered from the work of Faith and Order will also nourish us as we look to the Sixth World Conference and continue on the Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation, and Unity on which we embarked following the WCC's 11th Assembly in 2022.

Prof. Dr Andrej Jeftić

Stephenie Dietrich and Andrej Jeftić Photo: Gloria Koymans/WCC

Commission on Faith and Order meeting in Indonesia, February 2024 Photo: Dalton Darwin/WCC

Meeting of the Faith and Order Commission in Tondano, North Sulawesi, Indonesia, 2–7 February 2024

The Commission on Faith and Order convened in Tondano, North Sulawesi, Indonesia, on 2–7 February 2024 for its first in-person meeting since being elected by the WCC central committee in June 2023.

In this, the first meeting of the newly elected commission, the commission considered plans for the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order in 2025, which coincides with the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea. The Sixth World Conference will ask "Where now for visible unity?" At its meeting in Indonesia, the commission discussed research on Nicaea and its continuing influence and how to use the conference and the anniversary to share Faith and Order's work with a wider audience.

Commissioners also looked further ahead, forming study groups to take forward theological work in the areas they identified as being most important for ecumenical study. Study Group 1 will consider ecclesiological questions under the heading "Being Church on the Way Towards Visible Unity." Study Group 2 will focus on "Being Human: Discerning Humanity in the Image of God" and will take forward work on moral discernment and on theological anthropology. Study Group 3, on "The Church in and for the World," will focus on questions of peace, violence, and reconciliation.

Commission members reflected on how decolonial thought, the digital revolution, global migration, and other major changes in today's world might affect how they do their theological work.

The study groups are planning to use a wide range of methods, with members of some groups preparing papers to reflect on their own contexts and others seeking opportunities to engage with Christian communities not currently involved in the work of the WCC. Online meetings will give the study groups opportunities to stay in touch more frequently throughout the year, and online spaces can be used to build up a bank of shared resources.

Commission members also spent time getting to know each other and learning about the unique context of the church in North Sulawesi. Indonesia is the world's largest Muslim country, but Manado, the capital of North Sulawesi, is known as the "city of a thousand churches" – and 13 of those churches welcomed commission members on the Sunday morning. Young people from local churches served as stewards during the commission meeting.

Rev. Prof. Dr Stephanie Dietrich, moderator of the Faith and Order Commission, said: "We were overwhelmed by the warm and generous welcome from our Indonesian brothers and sisters, and we are so grateful to everyone who has enabled this meeting to happen. As a commission we have a long road ahead of us, but we are full of hope and eager to begin our work."

www.oikoumene.org/news/new-chapter-begins-for-wcc-faith-and-order-commission

News from the Study Groups

The study groups were formed at the meeting of the Commission on Faith and Order in February 2024.

Study Group 1: "Being Church on the Way Towards Visible Unity"

The co-conveners of Study Group 1 are Rev. Dr Sotorios Boukis (Evangelical Church of Greece, Greece) and Rev. Dr Ge Wen (China Christian Council, China). Staff support is provided by Rev. Prof. Dr Martin Illert.

Study Group 1 is meeting quarterly via Zoom, with each meeting focusing on two goals: (1) to have initial discussions on the key topics identified at the Indonesia meeting and (2) to be informed about developments for the Sixth World Conference and how the group can contribute to it. In each Zoom meeting a guest speaker (usually a member of the previous commission) is invited to offer reflections on the work of previous years and on possible ways forward, followed by responses and discussion on the topic between the study group members.

Focus on Baptismal Ecclesiology

The first study group meeting, on 15 May 2024, focussed on baptismal ecclesiology. Dr Paul Meyendorff, a Faith and Order commissioner for many years, suggested in his paper "Towards a Baptismal Ecclesiology" that, after the fruitful "rediscovering" of eucharistic ecclesiology in the 20th century, the complementary topic of baptismal ecclesiology should now also be discussed more thoroughly to explore what it means to "put on Christ" and to become members of his body.

Three short responses were offered by study group members: H.E. Metropolitan Dr Theophilose from an Oriental Orthodox perspective, Prof. Rev. Dr Charlotte Methuen from an Anglican perspective, and Dr Johannes Oeldemann from a Roman Catholic perspective. This led to a fruitful discussion.

At the same meeting, Prof. Dr Andrej Jeftić, director of the Faith and Order Commission, and Rev. Dr Mikie Roberts, WCC programme executive for Spiritual Life and Faith and Order, presented the draft programme of the World Conference and the plenaries most closely related to the study group.

Focus on Ecclesiology, Pneumatology, and Spirituality

The first part of the second Zoom meeting, on 3 September 2024, centred on ecclesiology, pneumatology, and spirituality. The previous Faith and Order Commission had worked on how these three areas interconnect, and had offered a very promising potential of further convergence worth exploring.

Guest speaker Rev. Prof. Dr Cecil "Mel" Robeck, a former, long-time Faith and Order commissioner, touched on issues such as the relationship of the institutional and the charismatic aspect of the Church, the role of discernment, the spirituality of encountering God in the Church, and also ways in which the Nicene Creed invites us to think about the relationship between ecclesiology and pneumatology. After responses from Prof. Dr Angela Berlis (Old Catholic perspective) and Rev. Dr Sotiris Boukis (Evangelical/Reformed perspective), a productive discussion ensued.

The second part of the meeting offered the opportunity to brainstorm on potential topics for workshops for the World Conference and to collect many ideas related to the ecclesiological focus of the study group that are to be forwarded to the Nicaea Steering Group as proposals from the study group.

Focus on Visible Unity

In the third meeting, on 18 November 2024, the group focussed on the key theme of visible unity and especially on the responses to *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* on this specific topic, as outlined in *Common Threads*, Faith and Order Paper No. 233 (2021). Rev. Dr Susan Durber, former moderator of Faith and Order, and currently WCC president for the Europe region, presented the relevant chapter "Visible Unity and Mutual Recognition."

Study Group 2: "Being Human: Discerning Humanity in the Image of God."

The co-conveners of Study Group 2 are Archbishop em. Dr Antje Jacklén (Church of Sweden, Sweden) and Prof. Dr David Kirchhoffer (Roman Catholic Church, Australia). Staff support is provided by Rev. Prof. Dr Vasile-Octavian Mihoc.

During the meeting of the Faith and Order Commission in Indonesia, Study Group 2 was established under the theme "Being Human: Discerning Humanity in the Image of God." This group focuses on theological anthropology and moral discernment, delving into the ways in which humanity is shaped by its relationship with the triune God and its lived context.

Identification of Focus Areas

In Indonesia, Study Group 2 identified three primary areas of exploration. The first was the relational nature of humanity as the image of God, which serves as a foundation for understanding human identity and calling. Secondly, the group named the processes of humanization and dehumanization, considering these both theologically and through lived experiences. Finally, the group chose the topic of moral discernment, aiming to enhance understanding of the tools developed by the previous Faith and Order Commission to navigate disagreements in ways that promote Christian unity.

Recognizing that "being human" is inseparably connected to specific historical and cultural contexts, the group will engage theological anthropology through diverse lenses, including scripture, tradition, the arts, the sciences, and various methodologies. The work on moral discernment addresses contemporary ethical questions such as artificial intelligence, transhumanism, human sexuality, gender, and climate change, with a particular emphasis on power dynamics and their influence on moral decision-making.

Early Meetings and Structure

The group held its first online meeting on 9 July 2024. To ensure effective progress, its members formed two subgroups. The first, focusing on moral discernment, is convened by Prof. Dr David Kirchhoffer. The second, dedicated to theological anthropology, is led by Archbishop em. Dr Antje Jackelén. This structure allows for a more concentrated approach to the group's multifaceted work.

By the time of their second meeting on 9 December 2024, the group had outlined a clear timeline. Key meetings are slated for 12 March, 12 May, and 10 September 2025 to prepare for the World Conference in October 2025 and to advance the work of the study group.

Proposed Workshops for the World Conference

In addition to its internal work, Study Group 2 aims to contribute to the broader dialogue at the World Conference. Four workshops for the World Conference were proposed during the December meeting, two from each subgroup.

The moral discernment subgroup proposed:

- History and reception of the moral discernment studies developed by the previous commission
- A theological exploration of responses to violence, addressing issues ranging from domestic violence to war

The theological anthropology subgroup proposed:

- A workshop examining general theological anthropology, which includes the impact of the Council of Nicaea on everyday human life
- A two-part workshop on theology, science, and technology. The first part would provide an overview while the second would focus on the relationship between incarnated humanity and digital humanity.

These proposals reflect the group's commitment to addressing timely and impactful questions about what it means to be human in today's world.

Looking Ahead

Study Group 2 is dedicated to making a meaningful contribution to the Faith and Order Commission's mission of unity. Building on the foundational work of previous Faith and Order studies on anthropology and moral discernment, the group seeks to deepen and expand these insights to address the complexities of the modern world. By anchoring its efforts in theological tradition and engaging with contemporary challenges, the group aims to bridge past wisdom with present realities.

Through its collaborative and contextually informed approach, Study Group 2 endeavours to provide new perspectives on what it means to be human in relationship with God and one another. These efforts will not only enrich discussions at the Sixth World Conference but also offer valuable guidance for Christian communities as they navigate pressing ethical and theological issues in an ever-changing world.

Study Group 3: "Church in and for the World"

The co-convenors of Study Group 3 are His Eminence Abraham Stephanos (Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, United Kingdom) and Rev. Preb. Dr Isabelle Hamley (Church of England, United Kingdom). Staff support is provided by Rev. Prof. Dr Henco van der Westhuizen.

In Indonesia, Study Group 3 gathered as part of the first face-to-face meeting of the newly elected Faith and Order Commission to listen carefully, engage in dialogue and discussion, and offer resources for the commission and the wider world on the theme "Being Church in and for the World." This involves exploring questions of mission, witness, and what it means to be a lived Church in and for the world.

Selection of Focal Points

In light of the 1700th anniversary of Nicaea, the group adopted the incarnation as its theological framework and point of reference. The doctrine of the incarnation grounds the group's work and shapes its conversations on mission, witness, and living as the Church in and for the world.

The face-to-face meeting was followed by subsequent meetings where the group decided on three interrelated focal points: methodology; violence, persecution, and war; and peace, justice, and reconciliation.

Focus on Decolonizing Theology

Regarding methodology, each study group member prepared short essays on what decoloniality might mean in their specific contexts. In this regard, Rev. Dr Carlton Turner, a Caribbean contextual and practical theologian and an Anglican priest, assisted the study group by delivering an introductory lecture on decolonizing theology.

Plan for Further Meetings

The group welcomed the invitation from Metropolitan Stephanos to host an in-person meeting in India in 2026. Meanwhile, as the Faith and Order Commission prepares for the Sixth World Conference in Alexandria, Egypt, meetings have been scheduled to work on the mentioned themes in relation to the conference theme "Where Now for Visible Unity?"

Photo: Albin Hillert/WCC

Activities of the Secretariat

The members of the Faith and Order secretariat are Prof. Dr Andrej Jeftić, director; Rev. Prof. Dr Martin Illert, programme executive; Rev. Dr Mikie Roberts, programme executive for Spiritual Life and Faith and Order; Rev. Prof. Dr Vasile-Octavian Mihoc, programme executive; and Rev. Prof. Dr Henco van der Westhuizen, research consultant.

Exploring the legacy of the Council of Nicaea for Christian unity

Dr Jeftić spoke at the Societas Oecumenica, the European Society for Ecumenical Research, which met 5--10 September near Warsaw, Poland, on the theme "Receiving the First Council of Nicaea Today: Ecumenical Learning from Synodal Discernment in the Early Church." In his address to the meeting, Jeftić discussed the conflicting interpretations of the imperial legacy of the Council of Nicaea, which met under the patronage of the Roman Emperor Constantine. The conference also included members of the Faith and Order Commission.

www.oikoumene.org/news/ecumenical-researchers-explore-legacy-of-council-of-nicaea-for-christian-unity

Conference on Dealing with Conflicts within and between Churches

Dr Jeftić spoke at a 14-16 October conference in Cluj, Romania, on on the theme "Metanoia and Dialogue: Dealing with Conflicts within and Between Churches." Organized by the Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany (EMW), the conference explored breakdowns in relationships, and interconfessional and intercultural conflicts, within and between churches, as well as experiences of colonialism and anti-colonialism within churches. In his address, Jeftić reflected on the experience of the WCC's Faith and Order Commission: "By focusing on dialogue rather than confrontation, Faith and Order creates a space where disagreements can be aired openly, and differing perspectives can be explored in depth," he said.

www.oikoumene.org/news/dialogue-central-to-dealing-with-conflicts-between-churches-says-wcc-faith-and-order-director

Consultation in Munich on Nicaea Anniversary

Dr Jeftić was among the participants at a 19 December 2024 consultation that brought together representatives of the WCC's Faith and Order Commission and the theological faculties of the Ludwig Maximillian University of Munich to discuss the 2025 anniversary of the Council of Nicaea. "As the First Ecumenical Council, it sought to articulate and defend the apostolic faith in the face of doctrinal challenges, establishing the foundation for Christian unity," Jeftić said in his presentation. Munich university is unique in Germany in having an Institute of Orthodox Theology alongside Roman Catholic and Protestant theological faculties.

www.oikoumene.org/news/faith-and-order-commissioners-explore-nicaea-anniversary-at-munich-university

Conference on Legacy of Metropolitan John Zizioulas

Dr Illert participated in the conference "Theological Legacy and Ecumenical Vision: A Conference in Memory of Metropolitan John D. Zizioulas of Pergamon," held 5-7 November 2024 in Istanbul. where he contributed a paper on Zizioulas and Protestantism. Zizioulas' concept of koinonia played an important role at the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order, and he opened up new eco-theological perspectives by emphasizing the cosmic dimension of the eucharist, thus providing an important resource for the WCC's Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace.

The conference was organized by the Ecumenical Patriarchate, in collaboration with the Volos Academy for Theological Studies and the Orthodox Christian Studies Center at Fordham University (USA).

www.oikoumene.org/news/istanbul-conference-remembers-theological-and-ecumenical-vision-of-elder-metropolitan-john-zizioulas

Permanent Committee on Consensus and Collaboration

Dr Mihoc attended the first meeting of the Permanent Committee on Consensus and Collaboration following its reappointment by the WCC central committee in June 2023. At the meeting held in Istanbul, Türkiye, on 10–14 March 2024, Dr Jeftić provided a comprehensive report on the work of Faith and Order. This gathering marked a significant step in fostering consensus and collaboration among member churches of the WCC, affirming the importance of the Faith and Order Commission's contributions in building theological understanding across traditions.

www.oikoumene.org/news/new-wcc-permanent-committee-on-consensus-and-collaboration-holds-inaugural-meeting

Accompanying the WCC General Secretary

Dr Mihoc accompanied WCC general secretary Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay on various visits in 2024, sharing Faith and Order's vision and plans for the forthcoming World Conference in 2025. The visits included one to China on 23–28 May, to the cities of Shanghai, Nanjing, and Beijing. Discussions highlighted the vibrant witness of Chinese churches to Christian unity and their contributions to global ecumenism.

www.oikoumene.org/news/chinese-churches-bring-strong-witness-to-christian-unity

Visit to Anglican Communion in London

Information about Faith and Order's work for the 2025 World Conference was shared during the WCC general secretary's visit, accompanied by Prof. Dr Mihoc, to the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Anglican Communion Office in London on 8–9 April 2024. These conversations strengthened ties with the Anglican Communion and explored collaborative opportunities to deepen unity.

www.oikoumene.org/news/wcc-general-secretary-deepens-collaboration-with-archbishop-of-canterbury

Report to WCC–Roman Catholic Joint Working Group

Dr Mihoc presented the Faith and Order report on behalf of the director, Dr Jeftić, during the meeting of the Joint Working Group (JWG) of the WCC and the Roman Catholic Church in September 2024. The report highlighted Roman Catholic participation in the Faith and Order Commission, introduced the newly established Faith and Order study groups, and outlined plans for the Sixth World Conference, emphasizing the shared commitment to theological dialogue and unity.

www.oikoumene.org/news/wcc-roman-catholic-joint-working-group-convenes-to-reflect-on-priorities

Report to Conference of Secretaries of Christian World Communions

Dr Mihoc reported at the Conference of Secretaries of Christian World Communions (CWCs) on the Faith and Order work and plans for the World Conference.

At the 5–7 November 2024 meeting in Nairobi, Kenya, Prof. Dr Mihoc also addressed the reactivation of the Forum on Bilateral Dialogues. Sponsored by CWCs but organized by Faith and Order, this forum established in 1978 has aimed to facilitate the cooperation, complementarity, and reflection on ecumenical dialogue methodologies; the commission has facilitated nine meetings of the forum since its inception.

At the Nairobi meeting, a steering group was formed to explore future possibilities for the reactivation of the forum.

www.oikoumene.org/news/wcc-attending-conference-of-secretaries-of-christian-world-communions

Seminar on Decolonizing the Bible

Dr van der Westhuizen served as part of the Faith and Order representation – together with commissioners Rev. Dr Carlton Turner, Dr Daniel Andrew, and Rev. Jackline Makena – on the listening team at the seminar "Decolonising the Bible in the Midst of Colonial Legacies and Idolatrous Powers."

The event on 18–23 November 2024 in Cape Town, South Africa, was hosted by the Department of Religion and Theology at the University of the Western Cape, together with the WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) and the WCC transversal on Overcoming Racism, Xenophobia, and Related Discrimination.

www.oikoumene.org/news/seminar-will-address-decolonising-the-bible

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

The international editing committee that reviews and finalizes the resource text for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity met in Armenia on 13–18 October 2024. Dr Roberts was present as staff co-convenor of the meeting hosted by the Armenian Apostolic Church (Holy See of Etchmiadzin), which was given the responsibility of drafting the 2026 resources.

The editing work is done two years in advance to allow time to finalize and distribute resources in French, German, Spanish, Italian, and Arabic for the Week of Prayer, which is observed between January 18 and 25 in the Northern Hemisphere and around the Feast of Pentecost in the Southern Hemisphere.

Since the 1960s the Faith and Order Commission and the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity in the Vatican have collaborated to produce three-part resources for the Week of Prayer: an introduction that exegetes the chosen biblical text and offers an introduction to the theme, an ecumenical order of worship, and short daily reflections for each of the eight days. The decision as to which local group is asked to do the writing is shared between the WCC and the Vatican, with each making a proposal in alternate years. The WCC had responsibility for 2026 and invited the Armenian Apostolic Church (See of Etchmiadzin) to prepare the resources.

We use this opportunity to extend profound gratitude for the generosity and hospitality of the Armenian Apostolic Church for hosting this year's meeting.

www.oikoumene.org/news/preparations-for-the-week-of-prayer-for-christian-unity-2026-in-armenia-guided-by-hope

Photo: Albin Hillert/WCC

Activities of Commissioners

The summaries of the activities below are based on reports submitted by commissioners about their activities.

Rev. Dr Mercedes Garcia Bachmann

- Contributed a paper on the international Lutheran–Roman Catholic dialogue from a South American perspective for the digital symposium "Apostolicity – Sacramentality – Visibility: Building Blocks for a Consensus on the Fundamental Truths of Ecclesiology." The symposium, which focused on the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ), was organized by the German National Committee of the Lutheran World Federation and the Johann Adam Möhler Institute for Ecumenism, in Paderborn, Germany, on 30 September 2024.

Rev.Prof. em. Dr Sandra Beardsall

- Participates as a member of the World Communion of Reformed Churches–Mennonite World Conference bilateral dialogue. This new bilateral dialogue produced the document "Restoring Our Family to Wholeness: Seeking a Common Witness: A Common Statement of Confession, Gratitude, and Commitment," to be unveiled at "Anabaptism at 500" commemorations in Zurich, Switzerland, in May 2025.
- Gave a presentation/workshop on ecumenical dialogue, collaboration, and integrated partnerships in rural communities at the multidenominational conference "Renewing Rural Worship." This event in Nairn, Ontario, Canada, in April 2024 sought to address the gifts and challenges of worshipping in a rural context.
- Helped to plan and run "Camp Compassion," a week-long, city-wide ecumenical vacation Bible school for children aged 4–12 years held in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada, in August 2024.
- Took part in the North American Academy of Ecumenists meeting "Memory, Truth, and Reconciliation" in Toronto, Canada, in September 2024. The ecumenical scholarly society has met annually since 1957.
- Was involved in the Gaza Pilgrimage–October Olive Harvest in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada, in March-October 2024, a collaboration between the United Church of Canada and Mennonite Church Canada on events for education and solidarity with the Palestinian people.
- Made the presentation "Nicaea2025 in the Canadian Context" for the Canadian Council of Churches' Commission on Faith and Witness in October 2024.
- Is co-authoring a chapter for a book on Nicaea 2025 to be published by the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA.

Rev. Prof. Dr Marc Boss

- Contributed the paper "Ce que le document 215 peut encore nous apprendre" (What we Can Still Learn from Faith and Order Paper No. 215, *Moral Discernment in the Churches*) to "Œcuménisme et discernement moral," the 2024/3 issue of *Revue d'éthique et de théologie morale.* This essay is part of a series of articles on the topic of moral discernment as discussed by Faith and Order.
- Delivered the paper "Une perspective protestante contemporaine sur le symbole de Nicée" (The Creed of Nicaea from a Contemporary Protestant Perspective) at an ecumenical round table hosted by the Council of Christian Churches in France on 22 November 2023 at the Armenian Apostolic Cathedral in Paris. The focus for the event was the present-day relevance of the Council of Nicaea from Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant perspectives.
- Delivered the paper "Quelle Église? Quel régime? Du bon usage de la théologie politique en éthique théologique," (Which Church? Which Regime? The Proper Use of Political Theology in Theological Ethics) at the annual conference of the Institut supérieur d'études oecuméniques (ISEO) in Paris, on 13-15 March 2024. The général topic of the conference was "Églises chrétiennes et acteurs politiques : quelles conditions pour quelles coopérations ?" (Christian Churches and Political Actors: What Are the Conditions for What Kind of Cooperation?). Publication of the proceedings is forthcoming in 2025 in the series "Cerf Patrimoines."
- Delivered the paper "Le pragmatisme environnemental ou la critique de la critique de l'anthropcentrisme" (Environmental Pragmatism or the Critique of the Critique of Anthropocentrism) for the 15 October 2024 session of the ecumenical seminar series "La voix des Églises à l'épreuve de la crise écologique" (The Voice of the Churches Put to the Test by the Ecological Crisis), which focused on anthropocentrism. Dr Boss is a member of the organizing team for this permanent seminar series, which is sponsored by four Parisian theological institutions (Institut de théologie orthodoxe Saint-Serge, Institut protestant de théologie, Facultés Loyola, Institut supérieur d'études oecuméniques).

Rev. Dr Sotiris Boukis

- Attended the international conference "Politics as an Area for Expressing Christian Values" on 15–17 May 2024 in Thessaloniki, Greece, organized by the Council of European Churches (CEC), the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy, the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE), the Holy Metropolis of Thessaloniki, and the School of

Theology of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.
- Presented the paper "The Weight of History: Problems of Proselytism and Healing of Memories. Reconciliation and Future Opportunities. An Evangelical Perspective" at the Lausanne-Orthodox Initiative consultation "'Be faithful until the end' (Rev. 2:10): Revival of the faith" in Pelion, Greece, on 30–31 May 2024.
- Participated in the Fourth Lausanne Congress (Lausanne Movement) in Incheon, South Korea, on 22–28 September 2024.

Rev. Dr Felipe Gustavo Koch Buttelli

- Addressed the general assembly of the National Council of Churches of Brazil.
- Has been part of the Brazil national working group on the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, which has been working on the theme of Nicaea.

Rev. Prof. Dr Jacqueline Grey

- Participated in the bilateral dialogue of the International Anglican–Pentecostal Commission. The commission met at Shikwaru Lodge, near Mokopane, South Africa, with a focus on theological education and ministerial formation.
- Participated in the Catholic–Pentecostal International Dialogue. The commission met on 6–12 July 2024 in Lisbon, Portugal, at the Center of Spirituality in Alfragide. In the context of the overarching theme *Lex orandi, lex credendi*, the fourth annual session discussed sacramentality and Christian living.

Archbishop em. Dr Antje Jackelén

- Gave the feature interview "Religious leaders meet with EU to weigh situation in the Middle East" to CEC in January 2024.
- Participated in Swedish WCC platform meetings with the Christian Council of Sweden on 24 January and 16 September 2024.
- Participated in a panel discussion at the annual conference of the Society of Catholic Media Professionals in Germany (GKP) and led common prayer together with the local Roman Catholic bishop and Eastern Orthodox leaders on 15 March 2024 in Augsburg, Germany.
- Gave a public lecture on reconciliation at the University Church of St Mary the Virgin in Oxford, United Kingdom, on 18 March 2024.
- Participated in the installation service for the new general secretary of the German National Committee of the Lutheran World Federation on 2 June 2024 in the Stadtkirche Wittenberg.
- Gave four online lectures on anthropology during the Elijah Interfaith Institute Summer School and Interreligious Leadership Seminar "Sharing Wisdom, Fostering Peace" on 29 July–1 August 2024.
- Gave a lecture on hope for a meeting of pastors of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark on 27 August 2024 in Rödby, Denmark.
- Brought the keynote address "Lund, Rome, and Baptismal Ecclesiology: Relational Perspectives on Ecumenism" and participated as a faculty member in the 2024 PRO ORIENTE Summer Course "Ecumenism and Learning" on 2–5 September in Vienna, Austria.
- Gave a lecture at an ecumenical meeting for women from the Church of Sweden and Protestant and Catholic churches in Germany on 19 September 2024 in southern Sweden.
- Gave a lecture and facilitated discussion at a meeting with Swedish and Polish Lutherans on 20 September 2024 in Uppsala, Sweden.
- Participated in the panel " Hope and faith in the future!" at the Uppsala Missionskyrka (Uniting Church in Sweden) on 24 October 2024.
- Participates as (likely) the only non-Anglican member in the Anglican Communion Science Commission, with four meetings per year.
- Contributed the essay "Der Ketchup-Effekt. Geschlechtergerechtigkeit in den Kirchen" to the special-edition publication *Gottes starke Töchter: Frauen und Ämter im Katholizismus weltweit* (Herder Themen, February 2024), which is also available in an English edition ("The Ketchup Effect: Gender Justice in the Churches," in *God's Strong Daughters: Women and Ministries in Catholicism Worldwide*).

H.E. Metropolitan Dr Job (Getcha) of Pisidia

- Participated in the meeting of the Coordinating Committee of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church on 3–7 June 2024 at the Oasi Santa Maria Spiritual Center of the Archdiocese of Bari-Bitonto, Italy.
- Delivered the keynote lecture at the conference "Synodality: Envisioning The Future of the Church" organized by the Huffington Ecumenical Institute at the Maliotis Cultural Centre of Hellenic College Holy Cross, in Boston, Massachusetts, USA, on 28 March 2024.
- Delivered the paper "A Reintegrated Church – Ecclesiological and Canonical Aspects" at the 26th International Congress of the Society for the Law of the Eastern Churches in Athens, Greece, on 16–21 September 2024.
- Participated as a fraternal delegate at the Second Session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops of the Roman Catholic Church on 29 September–27 October 2024.

- Gave the presentation "The contribution of Metropolitan John Zizioulas to the Roman Catholic–Orthodox Bilateral Dialogue" at the conference "The Theological Legacy and Ecumenical Vision: A Conference in Memory of Metropolitan John Zizioulas" on 5–7 November 2024 in Istanbul, Türkiye.
- Authored the book *La Divine Liturgie. Les cieux sur la terre* (Salvator, 2024).

Rev. Dr Tomi Karttunen

- Authored "A Joint Declaration on the Church? The Ecclesiological Dilemma in the Recent Roman Catholic–Lutheran Dialogue" in the July 2024 issue of *The Ecumenical Review*.
- Authored "Participation in the Triune God and Communion Ecclesiology" in *Religions* 2024, 15(8), 921.
- Authored "Auf dem Weg zu einer Gemeinsamen Erklärung über Kirche, Eucharistie und Amt? Eine finnische Antwort auf deutsche Reaktionen zu "Communion in Growth" (On the Way to a Joint Declaration on Church, Eurcharist, and Ministry? A Finnish Response to German Responses to "Communion in Growth") in the 1/2024 issue of *Catholica*.
- Authored "A Case of Differentiated Reception: Evaluating the Divergent Responses to the Finnish Lutheran–Catholic Dialogue Report Communion in Growth" in *Ecumenical Trends,* Vol 53, No 5.
- Authored the book *Nikea 325. Jakamattoman kirkon perintö 2000-luvulla* (Väyläkirjat). An English translation is forthcoming: Nicaea 325. The Legacy of the Undivided Church in the 21st Century. The publication seminar took place on 4 October 2024 in Helsinki, Finland.
- Participated in the WCC conference "Towards Nicaea 2025: Exploring the Council's Ecumenical Significance Today" at the Bossey Institute on 4–8 November 2024 and on the conference panel "Apostolic Faith Today: The Impact of Nicaea on Christian Doctrine and Ecumenism." A conference publication is forthcoming.

Photo: Albin Hillert/WCC

- Helped to draft the statement by the Finnish Ecumenical council on the 1700th anniversary of the Nicene Council and Creed.

Dr Maria Munkholt Christensen

- Participated in a bilateral dialogue meeting between the Lutheran World Federation and the Orthodox Church in Cairo on 24-31 May 2025. The dialogue agreed a statement on the Filioque clause.
- Editing the forthcoming publication *What Does Theology Do, Actually?* (Evangelische Verlagsanstalt) with the contribution "Looking Back at the Church's Future: Ordination of Women in Ecumenical Perspective." The publication is the third volume of *The Unity of the Church and Its Histories* issuing from the conference of the same name held in 2022 in Bonn, Germany.

Dr Tijana Petković-Bertsch

- Participated in and gave three presentations, including one on the role of Christian women in the digital age, at the annual gathering of the Orthodox Christian Youth Movement on 11–13 October 2024 in North Wales at the gracious invitation of H.G. Metropolitan Abraham Mar Stephanos. The event brought together 260 participants from 37 churches across the Diocese of UK–Europe and Africa of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church under the theme "Divine Algorithm: Orthodoxy in the Age of Artificial Intelligence" for prayer, dialogue, and enriching discussions on Orthodox theology and its relevance in today's world.

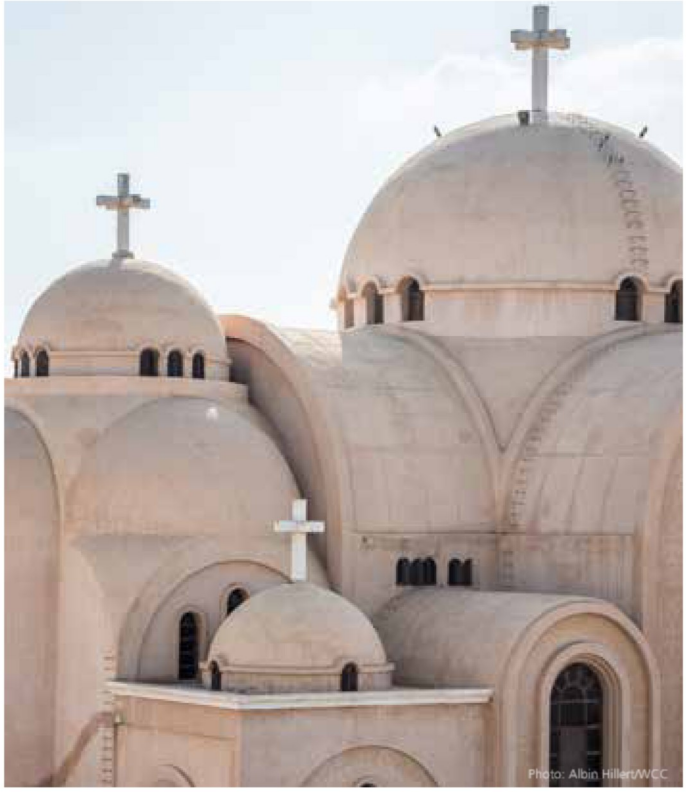


Photo: Albin Hillert/WCC

Toward the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order

The Sixth World Conference will take place from 24 to 28 October 2025 near Alexandria, Egypt, around the theme "Where now for visible unity?" The conference is being hosted at the Logos Papal Center at the invitation of His Holiness Pope Tawadros II.

The First World Conference on Faith and Order was held in 1927 in Lausanne, Switzerland, and led to the creation of the Faith and Order movement, one of the movements for Christian unity that led to the founding of the WCC in 1948. The Sixth World Conference, taking place almost a century later, will be an opportunity to bring together church leaders and theologians of different traditions as well as to involve a new generation of ecumenists at a time when the world faces climate catastrophe, the threat of pandemics, war, and economic concern – challenges requiring a fresh engagement of the churches with one another on core issues of faith and mission that both unite and continue to divide them.

The Sixth World Conference will be the centrepiece of the WCC's activities to mark the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, the first ecumenical council. This anniversary offers an opportunity to celebrate and reflect on the affirmation of faith in the Nicene Creed, the mission of God's triune love, and the implications this has for the common witness and service of the churches. It will be the occasion to explore what it means to live the apostolic faith together today and how the churches can summon one another to visible unity in Christ.

The conference venue is near the historically significant Monastery of Saint Bishoy, highlighting Egypt's profound monastic heritage and the depth of Coptic Orthodox spirituality, and bridging ancient practices with contemporary societal needs. The conference is expected to gather up to 350 participants including Faith and Order Commission members, official delegates, advisors, observers, staff, stewards, and special guests.

The key objectives are to (1) promote visible unity among churches, (2) reflect on how we life our apostolic faith together, and (3) celebrate and reflect on the affirmation of faith in the Nicene Creed.

The conference will offer a space for theological discernment and reflection. It will highlight engaging and participatory methodologies, placing reflective conversations at the core of the theological explorations.

The following methodologies will be used throughout the conference:

Plenaries will focus on significant theological reflection around the three key themes of faith, mission and unity as well as faith in the Middle East and the ecumenical future.

Two workshop formats will facilitate broader participation and engagement. First, group conversations will allow for collective wisdom to be collected and delegates and partnering organizations to participate and engage fully. Second, "oasis" (*wahatan*) sessions will focus on the work of the Faith and Order study groups.

The Logos Papal Center in Wadi El Natrun, Egypt. Photo: Bishop Anba Suriel

Attending local worship on Sunday as well as interacting with desert spirituality will give participants the opportunity to experience the life of the local Christian community and faith incarnated in contextual realities.

The preliminary agenda below gives more information on the flow of the conference.

The conference will also be an opportunity to receive the work undertaken by the Faith and Order Commission since the last world conference in Santiago de Compostela in 1993 and especially since the publication of *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, the fruit of three decades of international ecumenical conversation; this includes the almost 80 responses received to it and the Faith and Order Commission papers on 16 key theological themes that emerged from these responses.

A Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI) held in conjunction with the conference will offer space for a new generation of younger and emerging ecumenical theologians and educators to engage with the work of Faith and Order.

	Thu 23	Fri 24	Sat 25	Sun 26	Mon 27	Tue 28	Wed 29
07.00-08.00	Arrivals	Breakfast					Departures
08.00-09:00		Opening prayer	Morning prayer	Sunday worship	Morning prayer		
09.00-09:15		Movement			Movement		
09.15-10.45		Opening plenary	*Triune God and the Identity of the Church* Plenary		*The Church in and for the World* Plenary	*Unity: Living and Visible?* Plenary	
10.45-11.00		Break			Break		
11.00-12.30		*Where now for visible unity?* Plenary	*Unpacking Apostolic Faith: Living the Nicene Creed in Context* Plenary		*Mission: Common witness and Apostolic discipleship* Plenary	*Living Visible Unity* Plenary	
12.30-14.30		Lunch			Lunch		
14.30-16.00		*Sections*	*Sections*		*Sections*	*Sections*	
16.00-16.30		Coffee break			Coffee break		
16.30-17.30		*Faith in the Middle East* Plenary	Workshops		Workshops	*Ecumenical Future* Plenary	
17.30-17.45		Movement			Movement		
17.45-18.45		Business session	Business session	Cultural evening	Business session	Closing session	
18.45-19.00		Movement			Movement		
19.00-19.30		Evening Prayer				Closing prayer	
19.30-19:45		Dinner					
19.45-21.00							

Photo: Stephen Brown/WCC

A Selection of Past and Upcoming Events on the Nicaea Anniversary

"PASQUA Together 2025," 13–20 December 2022

The year 2025 marks 1700 years since the First Ecumenical Council, which brought together religious and civil representatives in Nicaea (now İznik in Türkiye). This council also defined how to determine the date of Easter, which exceptionally in 2025 will be celebrated on the same date by all churches. The meeting "PASQUA Together 2025," held on 13–20 December 2022, at the Orthodox Academy of Crete, in Kolymbari, discussed how the Christian world can return to the unity defined by the Council of Nicaea.

"PASQUA Together 2025" is supported by the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy; the Centro Uno of the Focolare Movement; Together for Europe; the Center of Ecumenical, Missiological and Environmental Studies "Metropolitan Panteleimon Papageorgiou" (CEMES); JC2033; and the Orthodox Academy of Crete (OAC).

PASQUA_Together_2025-Kolybari_meeting.pdf

"Receiving the First Council of Nicaea Today," 5–9 September 2024

The 22nd consultation of the Societas Oecumenica had as its theme "Receiving the First Council of Nicaea Today: Ecumenical Learning from Synodal Discernment in the Early Church."

This academic consultation of the European Society for Ecumenical Research gathered about 80 participants in Warsaw, Poland, on 5–9 September 2024, to explore recent research on the history, interpretation, and contemporary significance of the First Ecumenical Council at Nicaea for the search for Christian unity today.

www.oikoumene.org/news/ecumenical-researchers-explore-legacy-of-council-of-nicaea-for-christian-unity

"Towards Nicaea 2025," 4–8 November 2024

Jointly hosted by the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey and the Faith and Order Commission, the conference "Towards Nicaea 2025: Exploring the Council's Ecumenical Significance Today" gathered more than 130 participants online and in person – academics, church representatives, and pastors as well as the graduate students at the Ecumenical Institute – on 4–8 November 2024.

Through six keynote addresses and the presentation of more than 40 papers, participants addressed issues such as the contribution of Nicaea to ecumenical dialogue, its relationship to interfaith dialogue, the role of women at the Council of Nicaea, reimagining the Nicene Creed from the perspective of gender justice, and the relationship between Christian faith and empire.

www.oikoumene.org/news/international-conference-examines-significance-of-the-council-of-nicaea-for-the-ecumenical-movement-today

"1700 Jahre Konzil von Nizäa," 9–11 January 2025

"1700 Jahre Konzil von Nizäa: Vom Ereignis zur Rezeption" ("1700 Years of the Council of Nicaea: From Happening to

Reception"). Conference of the Alois-Grillmeier-Institut of the Hochschule St. Georgen in Frankfurt (Main), Germany.

www.sankt-georgen.de/institute/alois-kardinal-grillmeier-institut/tagung-2025/

"Nicaea and Beyond," 27 February–1 March 2025

"Nicaea and Beyond: Implications for Contemporary Christianity." Conference of the Faculty of Theology of the Malta University.

www.um.edu.mt/events/nicaeaandbeyond2025/

"Nizäa 325 – 2025," 6–8 March 2025

"Nizäa 325 – 2025," conference of the German Ecumenical Study Committee (DÖSTA) to commemorate the 1700th anniversary of the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea. Frankfurt (Main), Germany.

www.oekumene-ack.de/nizaea2025

www.oekumene-ack.de/aktuell/nachrichtenarchiv/artikel/std_symposium-1700-jahre-nicaea

"Nicée 2025 : dire la foi aujourd'hui" ("Nicaea 2025: Expressing the Faith Today"), 19–20 March 2025

A colloquium "Nicaea 2025: Expressing the Faith Today" in Paris of the Institut Supérieur d'Études Œcuméniques (Institute of Advanced Ecumenical Studies), supported by the Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox faculties of theology in Paris, in association with the faculty of Evangelical theology in nearby Vaux-sur-Seine., with the participation of WCC central committee members and Faith and Order commissioners and former commissioners.

www.oikoumene.org/news/paris-conference-looks-to-significance-of-nicaea-for-faith-today

Nicaea 2025," 2–5 April 2025

"Nicaea 2025: Context, Event, and Reception." Conference on the 1700th Anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, organized by the Angelicum at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas and the Patristic Pontifical Institute Augustinianum in Rome, Italy.

angelicum.it/event/nicaea-april-2025/

Ecumenical Symposium, "Das Erbe von Nizäa in der heutigen Orthodoxie – theologische, kanonische und praktische Herausforderungen," 1–2 June 2025

"Das Erbe von Nizäa in der heutigen Orthodoxie – theologische, kanonische und praktische Herausforderungen" (The legacy of Nicaea in present-day Orthodoxy) – a theological ecumenical symposium in Munich, Germany, organized by the Institute for Orthodox Theology at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München and the Working Group of Orthodox Theologians in the German-Speaking World.

akoth.de/das-erbe-von-nizaea-in-der-heutigen-orthodoxie-2025/

"Nicaea and the Church of the Third Millennium," 4–8 June 2025

"Nicaea and the Church of the Third Millennium: Towards Catholic-Orthodox Unity."

Conference of the International Orthodox Theological Association and the Institute for Ecumenical Studies of the Angelicum at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas in Rome, Italy.

iota-web.org/nicaea-2025/

Panorthodox Liturgy, 19 June 2025

Panorthodox liturgy in the Basilica of Constantine in Trier, Germany, to commemorate the anniversary of the Council of Nicaea. Organized by the Orthodox Bishops' Conference in Germany (OBKD).

"The Stockholm Conference 1925," 23 August 2025

Commemoration of the centenary of the Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work, held in Stockholm in 1925, a gathering that Swedish Archbishop Nathan Söderblom called the "Nicaea of ethics."

www.skr.org/ecumenical-year/the-stockholm-conference-1925/

"Dissent, Power, and Christian Identity after Nicaea," 17–20 September 2025

"Dissent, Power, and Christian Identity after Nicaea." Sixteenth international conference of the Ecclesiological Investigations International Research Network, in Thessaloniki, Greece.

thessaloniki2025.ei-research.net/

"The 1700th Anniversary of the Nicene Creed," 7–9 October 2025

Porvoo Theological Conference on the theme "The 1700th Anniversary of the Nicene Creed (Council of Nicaea 325)."

porvoocommunion.org/news/upcoming-events/

"Where Now for Visible Unity?" Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order, 24–28 October 2025

"Where Now for Visible Unity?" Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order at the Monastery of Saint Bishoy, Wadi Natrun, Egypt.

www.oikoumene.org/events/nicaea-2025#sixth-world-conference-on-faith-and-order

Important Faith and Order Documents

Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry

Faith and Order Paper No. 111 (World Council of Churches, 1982).*

Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM) is certainly the best-known contribution by the Faith and Order Commission in support of the efforts of the ecumenical movement toward its goal of visible unity. Since the final draft was adopted at a Faith and Order plenary meeting in Lima, Peru, in January 1982, *BEM* is also known as the *Lima Document*.

As then–Faith and Order moderator Prof. Dr Nikos Nissiotis and director Rev. Dr William H. Lazareth explain in the preface, the document is "the fruit of a 50-year process of study" (p. viii) that began with the World Conference on Faith and Order in 1927 in Lausanne, Switzerland. *BEM* builds on earlier drafts distributed at the 5th Assembly of the WCC in 1975 and on further WCC consultations, but it also takes into consideration the "specific findings of the bilateral conversations" (p. viii).

The text focuses on the three themes baptism, eucahrist, and ministry, but does not offer an exhaustive treatment of these. Rather *BEM* "concentrates on those aspects of the theme which have been directly or indirectly related to problems of mutual recognition leading to unity" (p. ix). Although the document is not a consensus text on these issues, it "represents a significant theological convergence which Faith and Order has formulated" (p. ix).

BEM is divided into three parts beginning with "Baptism," continuing with "Eucharist" and finishing with "Ministry." These three parts are preceded by a preface and followed by an appendix. After referring to the "institution of baptism" by the command of the risen Lord, the texts dwells on five meanings of baptism: (1) participation in the death and resurrection; (2) conversion, pardoning, cleansing; (3) gift of the Spirit; (4) incorporation into the body of Christ; (5) sign of the kingdom.

A commentary paragraph on the incorporation motif explains that "the readiness of some churches at some places and times to allow differences of sex, race and social status to divide the body of Christ has called into question the genuine baptismal unity of the Christian community and has seriously compromised its witness" (p. 3). Baptism is then related to faith and defined as "both God`s gift and our human response to that gift" (p. 3) and is related "to life-long growth into Christ" and to the motivation of Christians "to strive for the realization of the will of God in all realms of life" (p. 4).

Looking at the baptismal practice of the churches, the document distinguishes between "baptism of believers" and "baptism of infants" (p. 4) and emphasizes the involvement of the whole congregation of faith: "At every baptism the whole congregation reaffirms its faith. ... Baptism should therefore always be celebrated ... in the setting of the Christian community" (p. 4). A commentary paragraph to this section remarks that "differences between infant baptism and believers' baptism become less sharp when it is recognized that both forms of baptism embody God's own initiative in Christ" and that "both forms require a similar and responsible attitude towards Christian nurture" (p. 5).

After having defined baptism as "an unrepeatable act" (p. 4) and adding a commentary paragraph that asks the churches to "refrain from any practice that might call into question the integrity of other churches" (p. 5), the document explains that "all Christians agree that baptism is in water and the Holy Spirit" but they "differ in their understanding as to where the sign of the gift of the Spirit is to be found. For some it is the water rite itself. For others, it is the anointing with chrism and/or the imposition of hands, which many churches call confirmation. For still others it is all three "(p. 6).

A note dwells on the question "as to how a further and separate rite can be interposed between baptism and the admission to communion" and on the affirmation of baptism, "the most obvious form" of which "is the eucharist. The renewal of baptismal vows may also take place during such occasion as the annual celebration of the eucharist" (p. 5).

Looking at steps toward the mutual recognition of baptism, the document encourages "believer Baptists ... to express more visibly the fact that children are placed under the protection of God`s grace" and "those who practise infant baptism" to "take more seriously the responsibility for the nurture of baptised children to mature commitment in Christ" (p. 6).

The following section on "the celebration of Baptism" affirms that "baptism is administered with water in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" and encourages the churches to "take seriously and not minimalize the symbolic dimension of water" (p. 6). The note emphasizes the cosmic and the purifying dimensions of baptismal water. The

* All Faith and Order Papers can be consulted at and downloaded from the Faith and Order Digital Collection: https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/publications/faith-and-order-papers-digital-edition

document recommends considering the laying on of hands and the anointing or chrismation as "vivid signs" which "may be expected to enrich the liturgy" (p. 6).

BEM then mentions the essential elements which should find a place in the baptismal liturgy (i.e., scriptural reading, invocation of Holy Spirit, renunciation of evil, use of water, declaration of new identity as children of God, and members of the church, p. 6), adding that for some churches baptism is not complete without the sealing of the baptized and the participation in Holy Communion and that "it is appropriate to explain in the context of the baptismal service the meaning of baptism" (p. 6).

Before concluding the section on baptism by remarking that "baptism is normally administered by an ordained minister" and that "baptism should be administered during public worship," a commentary paragraph highlights that "the socio-cultural contexts in which baptism takes place" such as "the confusion between baptism and customs surrounding name-giving," the apparently indiscriminate practice of infant baptism "in many large European and North-American majority churches," and "the practice of baptism of the Holy Spirit without water" in "some African Churches" require increased discussion (p. 7).

The second part, on the eucharist, begins by referring to the institution of the eucharist by Christ and unfolding the meaning of the eucharist as "thanksgiving to the Father" (p. 10), "anamnesis or memorial of Christ" (p. 11), "invocation of the Spirit" (p. 13), "communion of the faithful" (p. 14), and "meal of the kingdom" (p. 14). In a note the churches are invited to "review the old controversies about "sacrifice ... in the light of the biblical conception of memorial" (p. 11). Referring to the belief of the presence of Christ in the eucharist and its relation to the signs of bread and wine, churches are encouraged to consider "whether this difference can be accommodated within the convergence formulated in the text itself" (p. 12).

A commentary on the paragraph referring to the eucharist as invocation of the Spirit emphasizes that the eucharist is a prayer and that "the invocation of the Spirit was made both on the community and on the elements of bread and wine. Recovery of such an understanding may help us to over-come our difficulties concerning a special moment of consecration" (p. 13). A further note refers to the "various attempts to understand the mystery of the real and unique presence of Christ in the eucharist" (p. 13) in the history of the Church. Referring to the understanding of the eucharist as communion of the faithful, it is mentioned that "there is discussion in many churches today about the inclusion of baptized children as communicants at the Lord's supper" (p. 15).

After mentioning the elements of the eucharistic liturgy (hymns, repentance and forgiveness, readings, confession of faith, intercession, preparation of bread and wine, thanksgiving, words of institution, remembrance, invocation, consecration, reference to communion of Saints, prayer for manifestation of God's kingdom, amen, Lord's prayer, sign of peace, breaking of bread, eating and drinking in communion, final act of praise, blessing and sending), the churches are invited to "test their liturgies in the light of the eucharistic agreement now in the process of attainment" (p. 16). At the same time "a certain liturgical diversity compatible with our eucharistic faith is recognized as healthy" (p. 16). A note explicitly refers to the use of "local food and drink" in the eucharist in some places and states that further study is required concerning this question (p. 16).

The section concludes by stating that "it is Christ who invites to the meal and who presides at it. ... in most churches this presidency is signified by an ordained minister" and that "eucharist take place every Sunday and every Christian should be encouraged to receive communion frequently" (p. 16). "Regarding the practice of reserving the elements," the text emphasizes the aim of "their distribution among those who are sick and those who are absent" and that "the best way of showing respect for the elements served in the eucharistic celebration is their consumption" (p. 16).

The opening section on ministry describes "the calling of the whole people of God" that is addressed to "the whole of humanity" so that "in Jesus Christ all people should share in this fellowship" of the Church that "lives through the liberating and renewing power of the Spirit" and "is called to prefigure the kingdom of God" (p. 20). The document then looks at the Church and ordained ministry and differentiates between "charism," "ministry," "ordained ministry," and "priesthood" (p. 21-23). "Ordained ministry" is defined as "constitutive for the life and the witness of the church" (p. 21).

As the note explains, while "any member of the body may share in proclaiming and teaching the Word of God ... ordained ministry fulfils these functions in a representative way, providing witness for the life and the unity of the community" (p. 22). Regarding the place of this representation, our document explains that "it is especially in the eucharistic celebration that the ordained ministry is the visible focus of the deep and all-embracing communion between Christ and the members of his body" (p. 22). A note relates this role to the "task of guiding the community, i.e. supervising its life (*episkopé*) and strengthening its vigilance" (p. 22).

A passage on ordained ministry and authority explains that "the authority of the ordained minister is rooted in Jesus Christ," and therefore ordained ministers "exercise the authority of Christ in a way Christ himself revealed

God's authority to the world" because "authority cannot be exercised without regard for the community" (p. 23).

Referring to "ordained ministry and priesthood," the document states that although the Church as a whole may be described as a priesthood, ordained ministers "fulfil a particular priestly service by strengthening and building up the royal and prophetic priesthood of the faithful through word and sacrament" (p. 23). A note explains the use of "priest" in the New Testament and in the early church (p. 23).

On the ordination of women, the text remarks, "an increasing number of churches have decided that there is no biblical or theological reason against the ordination of women ... yet many churches hold, that the tradition of the Church in this regard must not be changed" (p. 24).

The following section deals with the forms of ordained ministry and focuses on the threefold ministry of bishops, presbyters, and deacons (p. 24). In the early church, the ministry of the bishop came to be regarded as a focus for unity within the whole community. The document says that today "the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon may serve as a pattern of unity" (p. 24). A ministry of *episkopé* is considered necessary for every church in some form in order to be the church of God.

At the same time, the document states that "the threefold pattern stands in need of reform" and "thus raises questions for all the churches" (p. 25). As guiding principles for the exercise of ordained ministry in the Church, our document considers that "the ordained ministry should be exercised in a personal, collegial and communal way" and comments that "these three aspects should be kept together" (p. 26).

Regarding the functions of bishops, presbyters, and deacons, bishops are "representative pastoral ministers of oversight, continuity and unity in the Church" while "presbyters serve as pastoral ministers of the word and the sacraments in a local eucharistic community" and "deacons represent the church in its calling as servant in the world" (p. 26–27). A note emphasizes that "differences in ordering the diaconical ministry should not be regarded as a hindrance for the mutual recognition of the ordained ministries" (p. 27).

Underlining the variety of charisms, *BEM* states: "The community which lives in the power of the spirit will be characterized by a variety of charisms. ... In the history of the church there have been times when the truth of the Gospel could only be preserved through prophetic and charismatic leaders. Often new impulses could find their way into the life of the church only in unusual ways. At times reforms required a special ministry. The ordained ministers and the whole community will need to be attentive to the challenge of such special ministries" (p. 27–28).

The following section on succession in the apostolic tradition in the Church first dwells on the apostolicity of

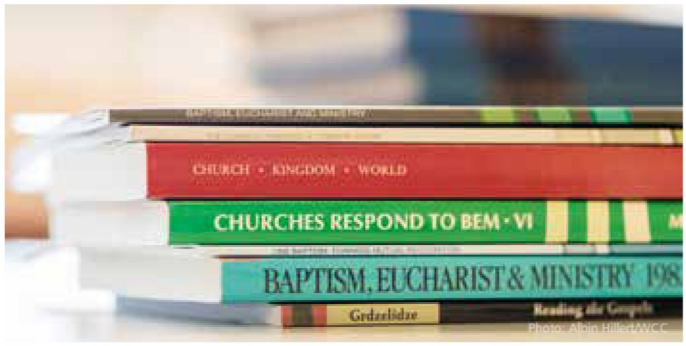


Photo: Albin Hillert/WCC

the Church as it is confessed in the creed, then moves to the succession of apostolic ministry: "Within the church the ordained ministry has a particular task of preserving and actualizing the apostolic faith. The orderly transmission of ordained ministry is therefore a powerful expression of the continuity of the church throughout history" (p. 28).

A note explains that in the early church apostolicity could either be understood in a historical sense (as in Clement of Rome) or "also manifest a spiritual reality" (p. 28). The part closes with remarks on the meaning of ordination (p. 30) as an appointment to ministry, the act of ordination (by the laying on of hands, the invocation of God, the granting of the prayer by the Lord, and the acknowledgement by the Church of the gifts of the Spirit), and the conditions for ordination (p. 31).

Regarding the mutual recognition of ministries (p. 32), the document recommends that churches that have kept the episcopal succession acknowledge "the apostolic content of the ordained ministry" within churches "which have not maintained such succession and also the existence within these churches of a form of *episkopé*" (p. 32).

Churches which have not maintained this tradition are asked to "to realize that the continuity with the church of the apostles find profound expression by the successive laying on of hands by bishops and that, though they may not lack the continuity of the apostolic tradition, this sign will strengthen and deepen that continuity" (p. 32).

Together with the distribution of the document, the Faith and Order Commission invited the churches to enter into "a process of reception" and "to prepare an official response" and describe to what extent they can recognize in the document "the faith of the church through the ages," and "the consequences [and] the guidance your church can take from this text" and to add "suggestions your church can make for the ongoing work of Faith and Order."

Reception

The convergence document had a wide reception among churches.

The official responses to *BEM – Churches Respond to BEM* – were edited by Max Thurian and appeared in six volumes produced by WCC Publications:

- Vol. I, Faith and Order Paper No. 129 (1986),
- Vol. II, Faith and Order Paper No. 132 (1986),
- Vol. III, Faith and Order Paper No. 135 (1987),
- Vol. IV, Faith and Order Paper No. 137 (1987),
- Vol. V, Faith and Order Paper No. 143 (1988),
- Vol. VI, Faith and Order Paper No. 144 (1988),

A special volume *Orthodox Perspectives on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* was edited by Gennadios Limouris and Nomikos Michael Vaporis and published as Faith and Order Paper No. 128 (WCC Publications: 1985).

Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982– 1990: Report on the Process and Responses, Faith and Order Paper No. 149 (WCC Publications, 1990).

Further WCC publications on *BEM* include, in order of date of publication:

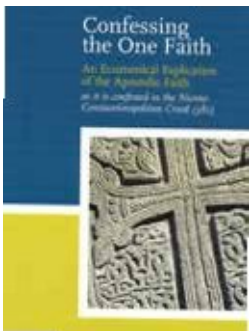
William H. Lazareth, ed., *Growing together in Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry: A Study Guide*, Faith and Order Paper No. 114 (WCC Publications, 1982).

Max Thurian et al., *Ecumenical Perspectives on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No. 116 (WCC Publications, 1983).

Max Thurian and Geoffrey Wainwright, ed., *Baptism and Eucharist: Ecumenical Convergence in Celebration*, Faith and Order Paper No. 113 (WCC Publications, 1983).

Thomas F. Best and Tamara Grdzelidze, ed., *BEM at 25: Critical Insights into a Continuing Legacy*, Faith and Order Paper No. 205 (WCC Publications, 2007).

Dr Martin Illert



Confessing the One Faith: An Ecumenical Explication of the Apostolic Faith as It Is Confessed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381)

Revised version with a new preface, Faith and Order Paper No. 153, (WCC Publications, 1991), Faith and Order Digital Collection.

The Faith and Order study document *Confessing the One Faith: An Ecumenical Explication of the One Faith as it is Confessed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381)* (Faith and Order Paper No. 153) was the result of an almost 10-year study process initiated by the Faith and Order Commission in its meeting at Lima, Peru, in 1982.

As its introduction outlines, this 1991 study document is a thorough revision of a previous provisional draft from 1987 – *Confessing One Faith: Towards an Ecumenical Explication of the Apostolic Faith as Expressed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381)*, Faith and Order Paper No. 140 – which had "received a considerable number of reactions either by theologians, ecumenical institutes, theological faculties, ecumenical conferences, commissions of churches or Faith and Order commissions of national churches, or Faith and Order Commission members" (p. 8).

The introduction contextualizes the study document within the WCC work and relates it to the *Lima Document*: "The Lima text on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry and the responses of the churches to the text have already contributed towards ... visible unity. The present project of Faith and Order is intended to help the churches move towards the common confession of the apostolic faith" (p. 1).

Further, the introduction comments: "The Apostolic Faith study is related to the two other major Faith and Order programmes. It seeks to provide a wider basis and framework for the Lima document ... In its reference to present day-challenges the Apostolic Faith study will profit from the reflection on the [Faith and Order] unity/renewal study [*The Unity of the Church and the Renewal of Human Community*] on specific situations of human brokenness crying out for renewal" (p. 3).

Taking "explication" as the starting point for this the Apostolic faith study, *Confessing the One Faith* concentrates on the Confession of Constantinople in 381 "which has been more universally received than any other symbol of the faith," seeking to "discover and formulate basic insights which can be understood and accepted by Christians from all traditions" (Introduction, p. 4).

While explaining the contemporary relevance of the convictions expressed, looking at the role of the creed in one's own church, realizing where one's own church falls short of convictions expressed in the creed, and recognizing the churches who confess the creed as church and confess the creed in the presence of God, the document is not intended to be consensus or convergence text but rather "an instrument to help the churches to focus on and reflect together upon the apostolic faith" (p. 6).

The main body of the document is structured in three parts that follow the articles of the creed. (See "Structure of the Text," p. 8.) Each paragraph explains the language, thought world, and cultural context of each respective passage. It presents historical and biblical interpretations and adds an "explication for today" (p. 9). Both the paragraph about biblical witness and the explication are accompanied by short notes that cover special questions, for example, the different traditions of the churches regarding the title "Mother" for Mary as an addition to the theological discussion of "Father" and "fatherhood" that directly precede this in the creed.

After presenting the Greek text of the Nicaean Creed

(p. 10–11) and the Latin text of the Apostolic Creed (p. 12–13), Part I starts with the opening line of the Nicaean Creed, "We believe in one God", highlighting the difference between the "we" of the Nicaean Creed and the "I believe" of the Apostolic creed and commenting on the Augustinian differentiations between "*credere Deum*," "*credere Deo,*" and "*credere in Deum*" (p. 16); this part of the study document also relates the first line of the creed to the history of dogma, giving special attention to the *homoousios* of the Council of Nicaea 325 (p. 18: "It took time before the church gave a fully reasoned and articulated account of the relation between the One God ... and the One Lord").

Next, *Confessing the One Faith* explores the biblical witness of the opening line of the creed (p. 19) and gives an explication for today (p. 20–27), which explores the dwelling of divine economy (p. 20), the trinitarian character of divine unity (p. 21), and the relation between transcendence and immanence (p. 21–22) as well as the challenges posed by atheism and secularism.

The document comments: "While the religious traditions of humankind are indeed all testimonies of human experience and thought, they support the fact that human nature is inescapably religious. This means that to be fully human includes a religious dimension of life" (p. 23).

Starting from Acts 10:34, the document then claims that in the early centuries while "Christians believing in one God seemed to stand apart from other religions ... a closer look shows that Christian theology shared some common ground ... with other religions" (p. 25). After commenting on the relationship between Christianity and Judaism, and Christianity and Islam, the section on the challenge of other religions sums up that Christians "do not deny important elements of truth in other religions" (S. 26).

Confessing the One Faith then moves to the second line of the creed, "The Father almighty," informing the reader both about the motif of the Father and the motif of almightiness in the biblical tradition. The explication for today focuses on "the image of fatherhood and Father as a personal name," the "scope of God's fatherhood," and the motif of God's omnipotence, his being "Almighty"/"Pantokrator" (p. 29–33).

Next the study document looks at "God the creator," both in the tradition of the Bible (p. 36–37) and in its relevance for today, with attention paid to God's glory in creation (p. 39–40) and the responsibility of humanity toward creation, the threat of destruction, and the ethics of creation (p. 40–42). As the document confirms that the terms "Father" and "Creator" are relational, not only the relation between the Creator and his creation but also the responsibility and the ethos of creation come into focus.

Photo: Albin Hillert/WCC

Moving to the Christological part of the creed, "We believe in One Lord Jesus Christ," the document suggests understanding this section as three affirmations that contain three challenges:

1. The affirmation of God manifesting God's self to humanity seems to be mythological to the modern mind (p. 43).
2. The affirmation of God becoming incarnate in Christ is considered to be a challenge because it "leads to affirming the unique and absolute importance of Christ for all human beings" (p. 43).
3. The affirmation of the incarnation as a salvific event "appears as contradicted by continuing experiences of evil" (p. 44).

The explication then puts the Christological language into the context of the 4th-century theological debates and relates them to the biblical witness (p. 44–48) using Johannine language and terminology but also with parallels to the Pauline epistles and to Hebrews.

Special attention is paid to Jesus being called "The only Son of the Father," thus underlining the unique relationship of the Son of God to the Father, his consubstantiality, and his being the creative love of the Father (p. 50–52). Mary's virginity is to be understood precisely within this context, the document explains (p. 52–54).

Christ's suffering and death are not only related to his infinite love and his example for his disciples but also make known the state of the world (p. 54–64). Christ's resurrection and ascension are related to overcoming all evil powers and also are connected to the gift of the Spirit and the hope for the whole world. The ascension confirms that Christ will intercede for humanity (p. 64–72).

Finally, the document concentrates on the lines in the creed about the Holy Spirit, paying special attention to the discussions in Church history on the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father (p. 73–80), with a commentary on the feminine imagery of the Holy Spirit (p. 76).

The paragraph on the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church (p. 81–89) is related to the trinitarian communion (p. 84-85) and to the Pauline image of body of Christ (p. 85–86) as well as to the communion of saints in the Spirit (p. 86–87), the people of God, and the church's holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity.

Confessing the One Faith then comments on the passage "We confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins," relating this to the biblical motif of death and resurrection with Christ as well as the eschatological expectation of partaking of the heavenly Jerusalem (p. 92) and the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come (p. 97–104).

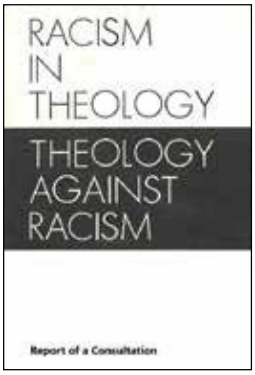
The explication for today for this passage focuses on the relationship between baptism and church membership (p. 92–93) and the change of life through which there is the connection to the theological question of grace and human activity (p. 93–96).

The final passage of the creed, "We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the age to come," is explained by returning repeatedly to the motif of hope, so that the main body of the study document concludes with sections on living in hope today and living our hope (p. 97–104).

Four appendices to the book were added by Gennadios Limouris (who later became H.E. Metropolitan Gennadios of Sassima and vice-moderator of the WCC). The first appendix contains remarks on the historical background of the document (p. 105–111), starting out from the first proto-ecumenical conversations of the late 19th century and discussing subsequent developments until the final revisions of *Confessing the One Faith* in the early 1990s.

The second appendix offers a glossary with key theological terms related to the creed such as "apostolic succession," "consubstantial," "*filioque,*" "person," "soteriology," and so on (p. 112–120), while the third appendix contains a bibliography of primarily theological works on the creed from the 1980s (p. 121–124) and the fourth a list of the participants of the consultations on the apostolic faith (p. 124–139).

Dr Martin Illert



Racism in Theology and Theology against Racism: Toward the 50th Anniversary of a Revolutionary Consultation

Following the WCC's 4th Assembly in Uppsala, Sweden, in 1968, the WCC launched the Programme to Combat Racism (PCR), which became a flag bearer for the WCC in Southern Africa. In September 1974, the PCR, in collaboration with the Faith and Order Commission, held a consultation in Geneva, whose report, *Racism in Theology and Theology against Racism*, was then published in 1975. Fifty years after the publication of this report, racism remains a major threat to unity, reconciliation, and justice in the world and in the ecumenical movement. The legacies of colonization continue to be a major determinative factor for life and wellbeing, with major global crises caused by the climate crisis, unequal access to health, inequities in economic opportunities, and multiple violent conflicts all coloured by a racist white supremacist logic.

The consultation in 1974 was a response to the call of the WCC central committee for theological reflections on the nature of racism and possible responses of the ecumenical movement to this fundamental problem, given its theological and practical implications for the ecumenical vision of life on earth. In their engagements, the participants set their work "in the wider context of discussions, criticisms and questions which have arisen in many member churches of the World Council of Churches, in groups and congregations throughout the world" (p.1). The consultation sought to expose the roots, causes, and implications of racism to propose appropriate responses from within churches.

One of the most fundamental elements learned from the consultation was the realization that "Racism is one of the most ugly features of the economic, monetary and political structures which give the growing interdependence of humankind its destructive and oppressive shape" (p.1). The economic, political, and monetary dimensions are often forgotten or dismissed as trivial or as not important to the quest for a racism-free world. While many people, Indigenous Peoples, Asians, People of Asian descent and many others have endured racism, especially in the global North, but in other places as well, Africans and People of African Descent, or simply "Black people" have endured the worst of racism, both interpersonal and systemic forms, globally.

This was acknowledged by the consultation, when participants affirmed that "[t]he history of racism in modern times begins with the African slave trade of the 16th and 17th centuries and the systematic extermination of the aboriginal people of the New World which accompanied it. At one period or another almost every nation in Europe profited from the traffic in African slaves and in North America chattel slavery became a basic institution of a powerful Protestant Christian society" (pp.2-3).

This observation is critical in its clarity on racism (often called white racism in other WCC documents from this period, including in this report) and other forms of ethnic supremacism. It also goes a long way in making explicit the connections between racism and European economic considerations, where the racist exploitation of racialized peoples has been motivated by the quest for economic profits

and domination. The abolition of the enslavement of people paved the way for colonization of Africa, Asia-Pacific, and the Americas by the same racist European powers, which continued with the economic motives of these powers, exploiting both people, lands, and natural resources (p.3):

In order to justify this massive expropriation of the wealth of black, brown and yellow people, the myth of the superiority of the white race was used, sometimes explicitly, sometimes as a tacit presupposition. According to this myth the darker races of the world were held to be sub-human or innately inferior to all white people. They were divinely ordained to be "hewers of wood and drawers of water" for the Christian nations of Europe and America. (p.3)

Since this period, whiteness and white supremacism entrenched through education, white privileges, theological education, visual images of success, and many other systems of control, including white or light skin and straight hair became widely accepted even by the oppressed peoples. The continued stigmatization of dark skin is a pandemic in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and many other places around the world, a US$30 billion capitalist industry is profiting from this quest for light or white skin.

While there are conversations on reparatory or reparative justice, which are being met by some strong impulses of resistance, the consultation also noted that "[a]lmost every aspect of civilization - science, religion, law, economics, politics, etiquette and art - have been infected with white racism. All the institutions of western culture, including the church, are inheritors of the racism which flourished for more than 300 years in Europe and America and continues today in many manifest and latent forms" (p. 3). Theology and European Christian missions were not spared from the myth of white supremacism and whiteness, as the report describes: "Western theology, not least during the last two centuries, has been deeply imbedded in Western culture. It has been shaped by the claims and assumptions of the superiority of white people over against other races and it has in turn influenced and undergirded some of these assumptions" (p.5).

Unfortunately, not much has been done in the past 50 years to undo this complex entanglement between Christian theology and the churches' conception of mission and white supremacism and whiteness. Thus, even in post-colonial contexts, our theology continues to directly or indirectly promote racially prejudiced theological positions. In some instances, hymns, Bible translations, and liturgical materials continue to be blind to the toxicity of white supremacism and whiteness. This has been made possible by the fact that racism has been coded into systems and structures of power, meaning the distribution of power and privileges is unfairly tilted in favour of Europeans or people of European descent globally. The report states "the struggle for justice requires a re-ordering of society" (p.11).

The consultation and report encouraged introspection by the WCC and member churches themselves to fully understand their own complicity in the historic harms inflicted on people around the world, through the European enslavement of Africans and colonization of Africa, Asia, Pacific, and the Americas. A call for repentance and action was lifted up, through which it was thought, genuine communities would emerge, strong enough to protect the dignity and humanity of all people. Such action would require the full and equal participation by both oppressors and oppressed, and such a process would be costly (p.8). With the realization how deeply entrenched racism was in all social structures, the report recommended the review of school curricula, catechisms, hymns, prayer books, Bible translations, history books, especially of churches and missions, especially the way in which racial prejudices were infused (p.16). One of the most striking recommendation draws attention again to the economic implications of racism: "In our ministry to society we need to work in the following ways: a) By exposing, through documentation and the mass-media, the inter-relation between racism and international economic structures of exploitation and so disclosing factors which contribute to personal and institutional racism" (p.20).

As look forward to celebrating 50 years of this fundamentally important document, many of its calls challenge us to recall that justice has not been done to the theological reflections of our forebears. Clearly, the reflections and recommendations have not been widely translated into action, and the call for repentance and action has not always been adhered to, especially as colonial legacies continue to thrive in our churches. The year 2025, the ecumenical year, and the year of jubilee stands as an opportunity to renew the clarion call in the report, *Racism in Theology and Theology against Racism*, and to transition to just actions beyond just statements!

World Council of Churches, *Racism in Theology and Theology against Racism: Report of a Consultation Organized by the Commission on Faith and Order and the Programme to Combat Racism* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1975). WCC Digital Collection: http://archive.org/details/wccfops2.256

Prof. Dr Masiiwa Ragies Gunda, WCC programme executive for Overcoming Racism, Xenophobia, and Related Discrimination

Personal Faith and Order Stories

Rev. Dr Susan Durber

Dr Durber was moderator of the WCC's Commission on Faith and Order from 2014 to 2022, and is currently WCC President for Europe. She was one of the "younger theologians" at the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order in 1993.

I went to the World Conference on Faith and Order in Santiago da Compostela in 1993 as a "younger theologian." It was my first experience of the World Council of Churches, my first visit to Spain, and the first time I had left my baby daughter at home for so long. I looked up the article I wrote just after that meeting and was surprised by what I found.

My memories now of that first experience of Faith and Order are of exciting worship, of the discovery of a global church that fascinated me, of political events shaping discussions, of stewards dancing to Spanish rhythms, and of exhilarating speeches from theologians I never expected to see and hear in person.

But my reflections in the article were less generous. Coming from a non-conformist church, I was suspicious of the naming of creeds as symbols of orthodoxy. Treasuring diversity, I found the calls to unity rather threatening, more like conformity than unity. Being a feminist, I was anxious that the voices of women were being sidelined. Wanting to have a Christian faith that engaged with the contemporary world, I was reluctant to place so much emphasis as the conference did on the early church.

I heard voices that spoke of "illegitimate diversity" and thought they could mean me and my church. I experienced ecumenism in that moment as constraint rather than liberation, and it was clearly a disturbing experience. I notice that I seem to have been particularly shocked that the Nicene creed was seen as a focus for unity. I wrote that "our unity can hardly be found in struggling to use the same words, even the words of the Nicene creed," and I warmed to one of the speakers, Elizabeth Templeton, who said that there is a danger of a kind of fundamentalism if we confuse our statements about God with God himself [sic].

The profound irony is that the younger theologian I once was became, some years later, the moderator of Faith and Order, writing articles about the meaning of visible unity, sharing in projects studying the teachers of the early church and, right now, giving talks and writing articles about the significance of the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea. What happened? Did I lose my early radical convictions? Did I just grow up? Did I sell out?

The truth is, I believe, that as I became drawn in more completely to the world of Faith and Order, I opened up my mind and heart to the wider ecumenical Church. Over decades, through many meetings, debates, projects, and study groups, I learned that there are more ways than one to be intrigued by and to become part of the ecumenism of the Church around the world and through time. I learned that even, and perhaps especially, "progressive" and "liberal"

people need a good dose of humility if they want to find wisdom. I discovered that unity can be close and beautiful and that it is not about conformity or abusive power when genuine but more like communion (the very word that the conference in Santiago lifted up).

It took me time, and it took wise and patient companions on the journey, but I am grateful that I discovered a broader field in which, even though there are often unpleasant disagreements and power plays, there is the hope of the flowering of a true and gracious unity. I am more grateful now in retrospect than I evidently was then! Indeed, I am profoundly thankful for my journey with Faith and Order – it has shaped my life and my faith immeasurably.

Interview with Rev. Prof. Dr Elisabeth Parmentier

Dr Parmentier was one of the "younger theologians" at the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order in 1993. She is professor of practical theology and dean of the Autonomous Faculty of Protestant Theology of the University of Geneva. She is also the Protestant co-president of the ecumenical Groupe des Dombes. The interview was conducted by Henco van der Westhuizen.

Tell us about your experience of the Fifth World Conference of Faith and Order.

I was a young theologian, but I was already well known in ecumenical circles, so I was assigned as drafter to the section that was to discuss faith, [together] with the Orthodox theologian Nicolas Lossky. There were very lively and conflicting discussions about the text in this section. I realized how difficult it is to accept the texts that come out of these assemblies and how much dispute there is between the delegates of these churches.

Nicolas Lossky and I spent a whole night working on the final draft, which had to be ready the next day. At the time, these meetings weren't as festive as they are now; they were more about in-depth work because the churches were really looking for a more visible communion [not only] in their faith but also in their major orientations. That's not to say it was negative, but at that time there was still a burning desire to go as far as possible together in formulations and decisions.

How do you understand the WCC/the ecumenical movement?

I understand the ecumenical movement as the Christian obedience of disciples who follow Jesus Christ according to what he lived: he removed the wall of hatred (Eph. 2). Ecumenism is nothing but the gospel lived out in its call to recognize and love one's neighbour as oneself. This also applies to the churches, which constitute the body of Christ, which cannot grow with internal divisions. It is the movement of the reconciliation of peoples and churches.

Within this ecumenical movement, the WCC is one of the most important places, federating the forces of the churches to guide them along the path of reconciliation without forcing them to lose their history and identity. It is a place where all possibilities for dialogue and the declarations of forms of cohabitation and even of communion are explored, as well as a place for theological reflection and diaconal action.

How did your understanding of the WCC change over the years?

In my generation, we traditionally hoped that through the WCC the churches would find visible forms of unity. There has been a lot of progress, but today these efforts seem to me to have faded away, and ecumenism is more complex to live with because there are no longer only the logics of confessional families but also [of] socio-political realities, with each church insisting on safeguarding its own identity. There are also churches that want only informal conversations and no commitment to visible unity. This makes it virtually impossible for the common faith confessed in the creed to lead to genuine mutual recognition of the churches. Many church traditions consider themselves more faithful than others.

What do you see as the role of the WCC/the ecumenical movement today?

We must continue to give voice to the gospel priority of reconciliation with "our neighbour" – it's up to each church to see who its neighbour is. The challenge is to be a witness to the world of the life of faith and therefore of self-giving, justice, and peace. The WCC can influence the political authorities when necessary; it's also an important force, but one that's not sufficiently highlighted. It should also be a place where mutual correction between churches is possible, where they give themselves the strength to recognize their faults and improve.

What are the biggest challenges facing the WCC/the ecumenical movement?

The intensification of socio-political identities; the loss of the quest for unity; the difficulty of confessing faith together in common formulations; ethical issues.

What are the greatest theological challenges for the WCC/ the ecumenical movement?

What concepts of unity could be fruitful for ecumenism today? What methods could help churches to move toward one another? What places are still doing high-level ecumenical theology today?

What is ecumenical theology?

Ecumenical theology is holistic because it involves all the disciplines of theology: systematics, history, biblical sciences, ethics, sociology, psychology. What unites all these disciplines is their focus on otherness: how is the other believer, the other church, the other people, a gift for us?

What should Faith and Order's focus be in the years to come?

Continuing theological work even if it doesn't bring immediate visible results; healing past wounds; calling for the conversion of hearts to a capacity for self-criticism; sharing efforts to work on the meaning of salvation and faith, justice, peace, and the preservation of creation.

How can Faith and Order contribute to remembering Nicaea (325)?

Recalling the ancient history, the theological meaning of Christology; clarifying misunderstandings, and explaining conflicts. We need to find contemporary ways of expressing the meaning of faith in a world that has changed!

Any figures or publications that served as inspiration for you?

Important theologians of the period: Mary Tanner for the Anglican communion, moderator of the Commission on Faith and Order 1991–1998; the Catholic theologian Jean-Marie Tillard, vice-moderator of the commission from 1977 until his death in 2000, and his work on ecclesial communion; all the work of that time on the meaning of communion, which went beyond earlier work where theology was limited to comparing the doctrines of the churches.

Any moment/period/project that might serve as inspiration for those serving the WCC today and in the future?

The years 1970 to 1982 saw enormous creativity with all those documents reflecting on models of unity ("What Unity Requires") right up to the preparation of the *Lima Document* [*Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*], where the process of reception in all the churches was unprecedented.

If the ecumenical movement is not received in the life of the churches and parishes, it cannot continue.

What role can tradition play in or as part of the WCC/the ecumenical movement?

Tradition is a reminder of the meaning of faith and why there have been conflicts over important issues – and what languages should be used to express them today.

What role should a particular tradition (for example, the Reformed tradition) play in or as part of the WCC/the ecumenical movement?

Several confessional traditions have contributed fundamental elements for the reconciliation of the churches: the Orthodox churches have insisted in the WCC on pneumatology and the trinitarian model at a time when the WCC had a totally Christological confession. The Orthodox churches have also opened up the question of the integrity of creation. The Lutheran churches have proposed the most successful model of unity to date: unity in reconciled diversity, based on differentiated consensus. Evangelical churches are currently opening up to the ecumenical movement, but the question is whether they are willing to enter into theological orientations towards visible unity. I think it's important to emphasize the value of ecumenism as an exchange of gifts.

What role can the local church play in or as part of the WCC/ the ecumenical movement?

The local churches generally restrict themselves to courtesy visits and invitations to celebrations and social gatherings. The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity has often become a mere duty, a ritual that is fulfilled without really developing any joint work. And yet there is nothing to forbid us from working together on Bible studies, diaconal work, and hospital and prison chaplaincy. I don't think local groups read WCC texts, but it's up to their ministers to develop all possible links in the life of their communities.

Can you leave us with an inspiring quote?

"Eucharistic sharing between churches is possible." It's the translation of the title of a book written by three ecumenical institutes (Tübingen, Strasbourg, Bensheim) in 2003 for the Ecumenical Kirchentag in Germany at a time when eucharistic hospitality had been severely forbidden.* The ecumenists who wrote the book explain that such sharing should be permitted for ecumenical groups and interfaith couples.

* Institut für ökumenische Forschung (Tübingen), Centre d'Etudes Oecumeniques (Strasbourg), Konfessionskundliches Institut (Bensheim), *Abendmahlsgemeinschaft ist möglich: Thesen zur Eucharistischen Gastfreundschaft* (Frankfurt/ Main: Lembeck, 2003); French translation: *Le partage eucharistique entre les Églises est possible: Thèses sur l'hospitalité eucharistique,* trans. Jean Courtois (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2006);

Support the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order

The Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order will be a major milestone in the history of the ecumenical movement. Recalling the significance of the Council of Nicaea renews our call to full visible unity. In the midst of divisions, injustice, and hopelessness, let us commit to working toward the visible unity of the Church. We invite you to join us on this journey.

Contributions For "Nicaea2025"

Account name: World Council of Churches

Bank: UBS Switzerland AG

Bank address: Rue des Noirettes 35, P.O. Box 2600, CH - 1211 Genève 2, Switzerland

Swift code: UBSWCHZH80A

Account number: 240-695149.00A

IBAN account number: CH37 0024 0240 6951 4900 A

Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches

Moderator: Rev. Prof. Dr Stephanie Dietrich

Director: Prof. Dr Andrej Jeftić

Web: www.oikoumene.org/faith-and-order

Recent Faith and Order publications: bit.ly/faithandorderpapers

Faith and Order Digital Edition: A full-text freely accessible and searchable archive of Faith and Order Papers published since the beginning of the Faith and Order movement: www.oikoumene.org/resources/publications/faith-and-order-papers-digital-edition

World Council of Churches

worldcouncilofchurches @oikoumene
@worldcouncilofchurches wccworld